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TAGS: PREL VE CI

SUBJECT: CHILEANS TAKE UMBRAGE AFTER LATEST CHAVEZ DIATRIBE

Classified By: DCM Emi Yamauchi for reasons 1.5 (b and D)

Summary

¶11. (C) Hugo Chavez' January 8 attack on OAS SecGen Insulza, who is Chilean, was front page news in leading Chilean newspapers January 9. FonMin Foxley and various political leaders all issued condemnations of Chavez' beyond-the-pale criticisms of Insulza, although Foxley added that the affair would not affect bilateral relations. Nonetheless, we imagine that Venezuela's new Ambassador to Chile, expected to arrive this week (and whose predecessor was recalled after statements considered unacceptable to the GOC) would have preferred a less rocky start to her tenure. End summary.

Another Chazez Bender

¶12. (U) Chile's leading dailies all carried January 9 front page stories detailing Chavez' diatribe, in which he labeled Insulza a "pendejo" (whose mildest translation is "dummy"), "viceroy of empire," and called for Insulza to resign as OAS SecGen. Foreign Minister Foxley issued a statement "...lamenting the statements made about the OAS Secretary General. We believe that when it comes to

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relations between states and also multilateral organizations the language employed should always be respectful and constructive, especially when there are or could be differences (of opinion)." Foxley declined to take Insulza's side on the matter (in which the OAS SecGen criticized the BGV's decision to not renew the broadcast license of the leading opposition television station), reiterating only the importance of politesse in diplomacy. He added that the Chavez insults would not affect bilateral relations, which were on another plane altogether -- and "good." President Bachelet declined to comment on the matter.

¶13. (U) Former President Ricardo Lagos, under whom Insulza served as Minister of Interior, said he "believed it's always good if governing leaders think about how to express themselves properly. It is a matter of language and good manners." Lagos' foreign minister and current president of the Christian Democrats, Soledad Alvear, described Chavez' words as "reckless" and noted that in her regular contacts with former and actual foreign ministers, evaluations of

Insulza's work "fills us (Chileans) with pride." Socialist Party president Camilo Escolana (Insulza's party) went furthest, saying that Chavez' declarations "harm and weaken he who makes them." Escolana observed that Insulza's character is not in question, rather it is Chavez who is "disqualifying himself." Opposition leaders also rejected Chavez' diatribe. Democratic Independent Union (UDI) Senator Juan Antonio Coloma - after noting that many Chilean socialists have previously expressed admiration for the Venezuelan president - said Chavez' statements are "to be expected from a 'totalitarean regime'" and asked the OAS to reject them out of hand.

Comment

¶4. (C) Chavez' latest outburst actually had the unexpected effect of keeping the other major news story of the day - the USTR's announcement that Chile was being placed on the USG's Special 301 Priority Watch List - relatively low profile. The GOC's muted response to Chavez's diatribe is somewhat surprising given its intense lobbying (with Chavez' support) to place Insulza at the head of the OAS. Unfortunately, it reflects typical Chilean aversion to making waves regionally even, sometimes, at the expense of principle. End comment.
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